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DECLINE AND CRISIS IN BIG-CITY EDUCATION.

BY- MASON, ROBERT E.

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CURRENT POPULATION TRENDS HAVE CREATED VAST EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS IN LARGE URBAN CENTERS. WHILE THOUSANDS OF LOW-INCOME PUERTO RICANS AND NEGROES HAVE MIGRATED TO CENTRAL-CITY AREAS, WHITE MIDDLE-CLASS PERSONS AND EXPANDING INDUSTRIES CONTINUE TO RELOCATE IN THE SUBURBS. AT LEAST THREE OUT OF EVERY 10 PUBLIC SCHOOL PUPILS ATTEND SCHOOLS IN LARGE-CITY SYSTEMS. HOWEVER, BECAUSE GOOD TEACHERS ARE FREQUENTLY DRAWN TO THE MORE PRESTIGIOUS SUBURBS WHERE HIGHER SALARIES ARE OFFERED, LARGE-CITY SCHOOLS ARE UNDERSTAFFED AND OVERCROWDED. MOREOVER, LARGE-CITY SYSTEMS, UNLIKE THE MORE AUTONOMOUS SUBURBAN AND SMALL-CITY SCHOOLS, ARE LARGELY CONTROLLED BY THE GENERAL MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT AND BY CITY BUSINESSMEN WHO ARE CONCERNED WITH LOWERING TAXES AND "PREVENTING IDEOLOGICAL HERESY." ALTHOUGH SCHOOLS IN SMALL CITIES REMAIN STRONG AND CONTINUE TO FUNCTION DEMOCRATICALLY, SMALL CITIES THEMSELVES ARE A VANISHING ENTITY. EDUCATIONAL POLICY MAKERS MUST THEREFORE BEGIN TO FORMULATE POLICIES IN KEEPING WITH THE INCREASING NUMBER OF SCHOOLS IN LARGE CITIES. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN "PHI DELTA KAPPAN," VOLUME 48, NUMBER 7, MARCH 1967. (LB)

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COVER PHOTO This scene was photographed last summer in a Head Start class at Toledo, Ohio. Our thanks to Richard Allen Huston, director of Head Start for the Toledo Board of Education, for the excellent photograph.—**The Editors**

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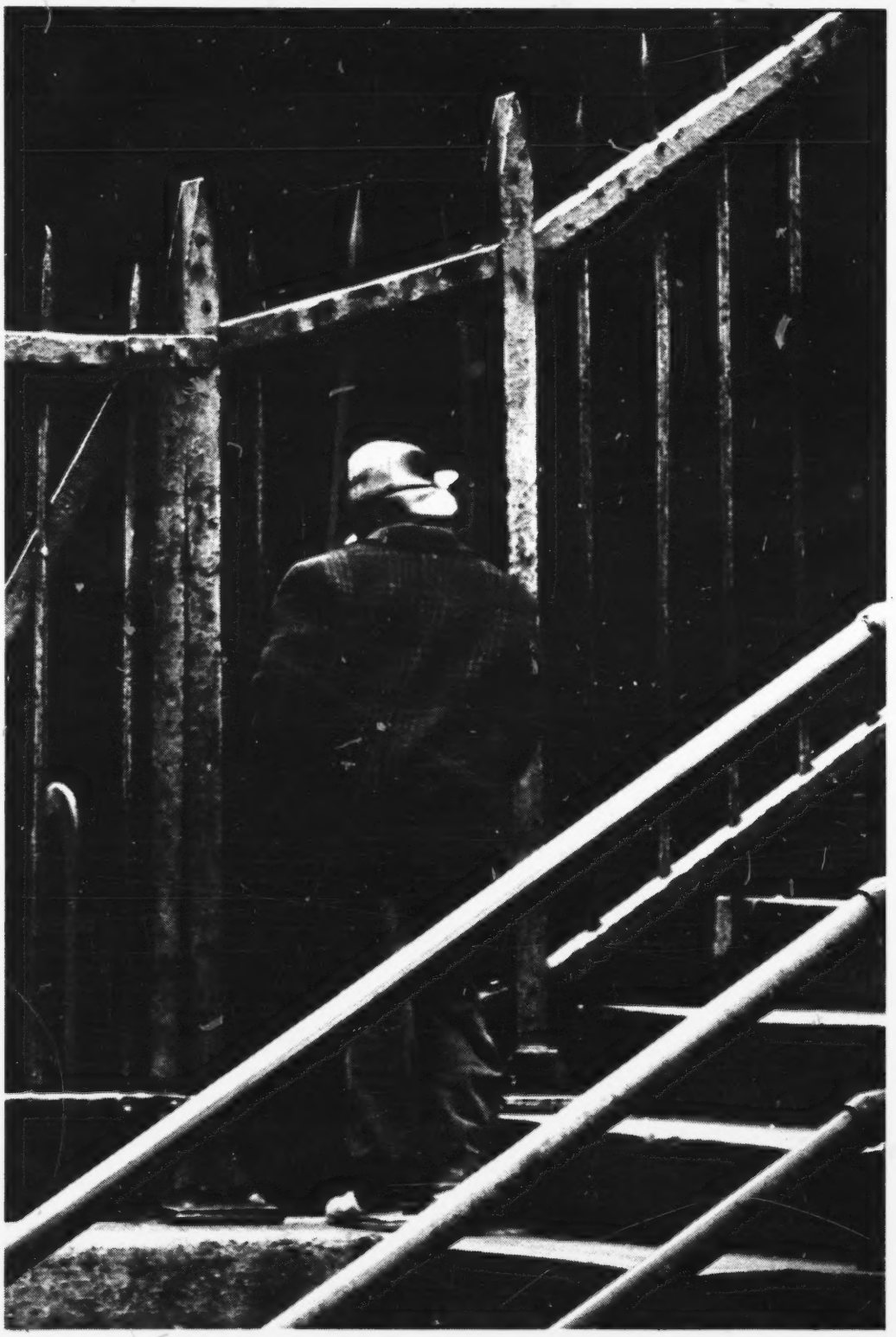
DECLINE AND CRISIS IN BIG-CITY EDUCATION

By ROBERT E. MASON

OEO photo by Morton Engelberg



"The city's potential for nurturing positive individualism and personality growth is very great, but what of the reality?"

THE city is a settlement of human population which cannot support itself from its own soil; it is dependent for the basic necessities of life upon those outside the city. Since 1800, with the emergence of modern industrial world civilization, larger and larger numbers of men throughout the world have moved toward the cities. The physical groupings in which human beings thus arrange themselves are shaped in accordance with the distribution of natural resources and climatic assets and liabilities. Among members nesting in a given geographical area there develop social relationships which regulate ways of doing things for or to each other, these ways again shaped, limited, and controlled by the drive for survival under the conditions provided by nature.

According to the Urban Land Institute's study of *World Urbanization,*[1] 75 to 90 percent of the population in industrial nations lives in cities of 2,000 or more, while in Africa 85 percent are rural. There are 112 metropolitan areas in the world today with a population of 1,000,000 or more. Twenty-three of these are in the United States; that is, one quarter of the world's large metropolitan area population and 35 percent of the population of the United States are to be found in these 23 centers. About 10 percent of the total world population is to

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be found in the great population centers (1,000,000 or more). As against the 25 percent of the population of the United States in the large metropolitan centers, Russia has only 5.6 percent of its people thus located. Five percent of the population of India and China live in large metropolitan centers. Extrapolation of the figures contained in the study to the year 2000 results in a sweeping forecast of tremendous worldwide urban growth and growth of large metropolitan centers. Some 54.5 percent of the total population of the earth in the year 2000, it is predicted, will be urban.[2]

The growth of the great cities throughout the world is a nineteenth- and twentieth-century phenomenon:

> . . . in 1800 there were only 21 cities of 100,000 or more population in the world. But in the following century and a quarter the growth and multiplication of cities were extraordinary. By 1900 the number of cities with at least 100,000 inhabitants had increased to 146; in 1920 the number was 202, in 1927 the number stood at 537, and in 1940 there were about 720. London, in 1802, was the first city to reach the size of the 1,000,000 population. Thirty-six more cities entered that size class in the ensuing years.[3]

In the United States, by 1850 half the population of Massachusetts and Rhode Island was urban. During the Civil War 20 percent of the nation's population lived in 392 urban places, and a little less than half of this population was located in nine cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants.

In 1900, not more than one-third of the U.S. population was in cities of 2,500 and over. This, in contrast to 56.5 percent in 1940 and more than 60 percent in 1960. Seventy-five percent of the productive income and goods of the United States are turned out in these areas. By 1950 there were 18 American cities with a population of at least half a million each and 49 with at least a quarter of a million.

Writing in 1962, a political scientist thus could say:

> In the past decade the American people have slowly become aware of a dramatic fact. We are an urban nation and the metropolis is our native habitat. Though we still think of a diffuse nation living in cities, small towns, and open-country neighborhoods, most of us will live out our lives within the compass of a few very large cities.
>
> Little in our past has prepared us for this. Our political thought was developed from a concern with the direct democracy possible (at least in theory) within small governmental units. . . . Today our governments are, in sum, a vast network. . . .[4]

There were in 1960 some 212 metropolitan areas in the United States, these defined as cities of 50,000 or over together with their suburban counties. Between 1950 and 1960 these metropolitan areas increased their population by nearly 24 million, or 84 percent of the total national increase. This growth, however, was very largely confined to the suburbs, which pre-empted 18 million or 76 percent of the total metropolitan growth. Thus, for example, the metropolitan areas in Maryland accounted for 70 percent of the population of the state. It is estimated that the population in the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut region comprising the New York Metropolitan Area will increase by 6,000,000 by 1985.

The French geographer Jean Gottman has given the term *megalopolis* to the giant population concentration along the American Atlantic seaboard from New Hampshire to Virginia, terming this "the cradle of a new order in the organization of inhabited space." Although the area considered by Gottman contains less than two percent of the land area of the United States, more than 20 percent of the population is found there. Despite the persisting problems of organization, Gottman concludes that disease and mortality statistics indicate improved health and that, all in all, the residents of megalopolis compose the best housed, best educated, best serviced group of this size in the world, and the richest group of nearly 40 million people in the world.

The growth of such vast metropolitan areas, however, has been fueled not only by a continuing mobility from rural to urban places but also by a movement from the center outward. For instance, the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area increased from 1,464,000 in 1950 to 2,002,000 in 1960—a growth of 37 percent—while the central city declined from 802,000 to 764,000, a loss of nearly five percent. Both Detroit and St. Louis experienced a decline of more than 10 percent between 1950 and 1960. Boston and Pittsburgh dropped over 11 percent and a drop of at least five percent characterized the cities of the northwestern sector of the country.[5]

Theodore H. White interpreted these data as marking ". . . the passage of the crest of the great city, the first turning of Americans decisively away from a community institution which has dominated our culture and politics for half a century."[6]

Not every city declined in population during the period between 1950 and 1960, for the following showed a net gain due to natural increase and/or to annexation: Los Angeles, Houston, Milwaukee, New Orleans, San Antonio, San Diego, and Seattle.

Obviously, with the exception of New Orleans and Milwaukee, it is the new twentieth-century cities that are growing; people in large numbers who could do so if they wished no longer choose to live and educate their children in the old great cities.

In sum, then, although the growth in population of the great cities proper has ceased, at least in the Northeast, the growth of metropolitan areas has not. Over 60 percent of the population of the nation is contained in the standard metropolitan statistical areas defined by the Bureau of the Census for the 1960 count. Eighty percent of the total population increase between 1950 and 1960 occurred within these metropolitan areas, most of this in the suburbs. Only in the South and West did population of central cities increase markedly.[7]

The decline in population as revealed by the census count does not, however, tell the whole story of the changes in the population of the old great cities during and since World War II. It is estimated, for example, that a quarter of a million low-income Puerto Ricans and about 100,000 low-income Negroes from the South and Midwest moved into New York in the decade of the Fifties, while more than 100,000 young members of the middle-income group left for the suburbs during the same period.[8]

The pressure for housing accommodations from these newcomers has led to deterioration in housing which was already beginning to show wear, and many of them cannot qualify on grounds of an employment record for newer low-cost housing. Thus the extension of city slums despite all efforts at urban renewal.

Not only most of the new moderate-income housing but much industry as well has located in the suburbs in recent years.

> Of the billion-and-a-half dollar industrial expansion enjoyed by the Cleveland metropolitan area in the post-war years, one billion dollars' worth has been located in the suburban municipalities. Most of the new houses have also been built outside the city limits.[9]

Whether the move of business and industry to the suburbs serves as cause or effect is debatable. It may well be that the evacuation of the city by the middle-income group fleeing high taxes and urban blight has been primary. It may be that business has evacuated in pursuit of the group deemed most competent to conduct it. In any case, outlying areas have been attracting new industry at a much more rapid rate than the old inner city. Thus, more and more people both live and work in the suburbs, and the problems of the central city have been further compounded:

> When New York's seven million included 70 percent of the population of its metropolitan region (as in 1931), it was still possible for its well-to-do outskirts to contribute to the solving of problems created by poor people and old housing in its center. Today its eight million constitute only 50 percent of the region, and the people who used to pay the taxes are now under other political jurisdictions. Simultaneously the percentage of criminals, paupers, juvenile delinquents, unwed mothers, and dope addicts increases. Such people are expensive, in terms of relief, police, education, sanitation, etc., and it is the central city, where they congregate, that must bear the cost.[10]

THE social and cultural implications of suburbanization and city-suburb stratification may be as important as the economic consequences. Some observers argue that the suburb, with its roots in a tradition of conforming fraternalism characteristic of the New England and Midwestern small town of the latter nineteenth century, is the real nurturer of conformity in American life; the great city, on the other hand, embodies the opportunity for a true individualism:

> The individualism of the city thus comes to have three distinguishing characteristics. One is that any individual, capable or incapable, successful or unsuccessful, may wrap a blanket of precious anonymity around himself. No one climbs high enough to be conspicuously alone on the top of the hill, and when one fails, his degradation can be his own affair. He may be placed in an institution, but he need not, unless he wishes, become a poor relation. A second quality is that for those who choose, life can be lived at the top of their potential. Tensions, neuroses, and stresses are obvious companions in such a drive, but so is a sense of accomplishment, a purpose for energy, rewards commensurate with effort. Finally, the tolerance of necessity begets the condition of civility. The fact that the city "compresses all life, all races and breeds," inevitably implies individual growth through a recognition of others. It is this characteristic that most sharply distinguishes the urban resident from the suburbanite, for although the latter has much the same range of economic and cultural choices before him, he has foresworn political and social responsibility for his associations. Instead he has undertaken to escape and evade them.[11]

The city's potential for nurturing positive individualism and personality growth is very great, but what of the reality? At least three in every 10 pupils now enrolled in the public elementary and secondary schools of the nation are to be found in the great city school systems. But increasingly the big-city schools find difficulty maintaining minimal services, let alone exercising creative leadership in the renewal of urban life so desperately needed in America today. Problems of finance, control, and working conditions comprise a contemporary crisis in the school systems of big cities.

Finance—One out of every 10 teachers in the nation works in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Houston, or Cleveland. Two-thirds of all teachers work in metropolitan areas with total populations exceeding 100,000.

Although cash salaries paid teachers in big city schools compare very favorably with mean salaries in their regions, there is not the financial advantage in a big-city position that there was before World War II. Moreover, the very best-paying jobs are not in the great cities but in their more opulent and prestigious suburbs. Winnetka and Evanston pay better than Chicago. Scarsdale, Bronxville, Pelham, Great Neck, Garden City, Hewlett, White Plains, Teaneck, Mount Vernon, Ridgewood have more attractive salary schedules than New York City. Lower Merion and Abington Township are ahead of Philadelphia. Grosse Pointe beats Detroit.[12] The NEA's urban project has underlined these differentials between the central cities and their more affluent suburbs in reporting that

> . . . salaries scheduled by the wealthy suburban districts are higher than those scheduled by the districts in any of the five enrollment strata included in the report. This difference exists not only for the B.A. minimum salary but at all levels, being even more marked at the top maximum.[13]

Obviously it is no longer true, as it was before World War II, that a career in a great-city school system offers the greatest financial promise. Recently, however, the great cities have been attempting to outbid the suburbs for beginning teachers with an A.B. degree. Of course, the suburbs prefer five years of preparation anyway; at this level they can outbid the city system.[14]

By far the majority of the school systems in the United States are fiscally independent, with powers of taxation and expenditure separate from other local government. Only 2,347 of the 37,025 school systems in 1961-62 were classified as "dependent," i.e., fiscally dependent upon another government such as a city, county, town, or township. Yet in 1960 the school systems of five of the nation's biggest cities (500,000 and over) and 32 in the 100,000-499,999 range were "dependent."[15]

Although special state aid formulae to provide an additional subsidy for sparsely settled areas have been in operation for a long time, it was not until July, 1962, that a state (New York) put into effect a law containing a correction for density.[16] Two reasons why education costs more in the big cities are the high prices of school sites, buildings, and operating expenses, and the expensive special programs—e.g., for the unemployed, dropouts, migrants, non-English-speaking persons, the culturally deprived, and the socially maladjusted.

Control—Some observers who have analyzed the school situation in one great American city have seen neglect as a major cause of weakness:

> The . . . school system suffers from neglect. More than half the Catholic children go to parochial schools, and many of the few middle-class Protestants and Jews . . . send their children to private schools. Since neither the Catholic nor the non-Catholic élite is vitally concerned about them, the schools are left in the hands of the teachers' lobby and the very minor politicians on the School Committee. For example it is said that policemen are usually stationed at crossings near parochial schools and seldom at crossings near public ones. The reason, persons close to the school system say, is not that the police play favorites but that the School Committee does not exert itself to get cooperation.[17]

By and large, the power structure in American cities is that of the business community. Although the school administrators are themselves recognized as a part of the leadership structure, they do not ordinarily wield large power. For example, the city which was the subject for Floyd Hunter's important analysis of community power structure was of half a million population. Both the city and the county superintendents of schools were found to be among the top 40 of the most powerful men in Hunter's "Regional City." At the same time, Hunter claims to have established that institutions such as the school have relatively little real power in community affairs. Thus policy, once determined by the real policy-makers who operate in the economic sphere of community life, is executed through institutions and associations. The economic interests are dominant in the forming of policy. Institutions such as the school follow along, but do not lead.[18]

In contrast to Hunter's findings which show that business leaders formed 75 percent of those at the apex of the power structure, studies of an English city indicate the greater influence of professional persons, with only 25 percent of the key power figures being business leaders.[19]

While there are numerous American examples of business leadership in aid to higher education, the enthusiasm of businessmen for the public lower schools has not been marked. Rather, it would seem that their major concerns have been those of keeping taxes low and preventing ideological heresy. While it would not be fair to accuse the National Association of Manufacturers, for instance, of being anti-education, there has been no clear evidence of support from this source for massive effort at upgrading the public elementary and secondary schools.

Working Conditions—New York City began the fall of 1962 with a shortage of 400 teachers, mainly due to the unwillingness of some newly appointed teachers to serve in difficult schools in underprivileged areas. Excessive overcrowding of classes in elementary schools is greatest in the largest cities.[20] In 50 large urban school districts in 1962, average class size in elementary schools was 32.2, 65.8 percent of all the elementary school classes had 31 or more pupils each, and 71.2 percent of all of the elementary school pupils were in classes of this size. Twenty-three and two-tenths percent of all classes had 36 or more pupils each, and 27.5 percent of all pupils were in classes of this size. Three and two-tenths percent of all classes had 41 or more pupils each, and 4.2 percent of all pupils were in classes of this size. New York's average was 30.6, that of Los Angeles 34.8; Chicago 35.0, Detroit 33.6, Philadelphia 35.4, Baltimore 34.7 (with 13 percent of the pupils in half-day session), Cleveland 34.7, Washington 31.7, St. Louis 34.3, Indianapolis 33, and Pittsburgh 33.5.[21] Even with additional money from the federal government, the big-city school districts have generally been unable to effect significant cuts in class size, mainly because they have not had the teachers or the classrooms needed to do so.

One low-income senior high school in Chicago enrolled 5,000 pupils in 1963. Approximately 100 of its 200 teachers were in the first year, and even the principal did not know all their names. There is a greater trend toward family instability in such working-class and lower-middle-class areas of a big city; a large proportion of the mothers work. Almost invariably, children enrolled in these difficult schools receive less instructional time than those in the more favored schools. Classes are larger, and there is a higher teacher and pupil turnover.

The larger class sizes in the Great Cities is further brought out in the following NEA data of 1960:

> Of some 91,000 classes in the 26 largest cities (500,000 and over in population), 87 percent contain more than 25 pupils each; 27 percent, more than 35 pupils each; and in 5 percent of these classes each teacher is responsible for more than 40 pupils.[22]

In the light of the recent strong move nationally to enlarge school districts, it is interesting to note the following statement of NEA researchers:

> Each of the four nationwide biennial studies by the Research Division has brought out the fact that a child's chances of having a fair share of his teacher's time and attention depend, in large measure, upon the size of the district he lives in. It is clear that the greater the population of district, the smaller are his chances of receiving the individual attention of his teacher.[23]

James B. Conant made much of the low staff ratio in the schools of the Great Cities. While some highly favored communities employ up to 70 per 1,000, the ratio in the large cities is even below the national average of 40 per 1,000.[24]

AMERICAN public schools at the extremes of population concentration are not working well. Financial problems, problems of control, and poor working conditions plague the very small and the very large school systems. It is in the smaller self-contained cities that public education, along with other crucial institutions of a democratic society, has remained strongest. Cities of a population between 10,000 and 60,000 have demonstrated capacity to maintain a good system of lower schools and one comprehensive city high school of solid quality. More often than not, the participation of a large proportion of citizens in school-related activities and decisions is high. In such cities, the impoverishment of the small village, the exclusiveness of the suburb, and the disorganization of the great city are minimized. Just as the community, while socially heterogeneous, is yet a viable social and economic unit, so the school system has functioned more as the instrument of democracy which its theoretical commitment promises. Hopeful and encouraging as this may be, the small cities are progressively being merged in the megalopolitan spread described by Gottman, and thus losing their cultural heterogeneity. It will not work to continue to build educational policy as if the nation were made up dominantly of rural, village, and small-city folk. Educational policy making needs to catch up with the rapid social changes which have made America today an urban society.

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[1]Homer Hoyt, *World Urbanization*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Land Institute, 1961.

[2]See "World-Wide Urbanism a Force in America's Future," in *Metropolitan Area Problems*, May-June, 1962, pp. 1-5.

[3]Amos H. Hawley, *Human Ecology*. New York: Ronald Press, 1950, p. 372.

[4]Scott Greer, *Governing the Metropolis*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1962, p. v.

[5]See "Census Figures Show Many Cities Losing; Major Suburban Increases," *Metropolitan Area Problems*, September-October, 1960, pp. 1, 5.

[6]Theodore H. White, "Perspective/1960—Census and Politics—1960," *Saturday Review*, July 9, 1960, p. 4.

[7]*Ibid.*, pp. 4-5; 28.

[8]Gerald Burns, "Controlled Rents and Uncontrolled Slums," *The Reporter*, November 12, 1959, p. 17.

[9]Oscar H. Steiner, "Slums Are a Luxury We Cannot Afford," *The Reporter*, November 14, 1957, p. 27.

[10]Nathan Glazer, "Megalopolis and How It Grew," *The Reporter*, November 12, 1959, p. 21.

[11]Robert C. Wood, *Suburbia, Its People and Their Politics*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959, p. 296.

[12]See "Urban Teachers Salaries Lag Behind Those in the Suburbs," *Urban Reporter Supplement*. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association Urban Project, October, 1962, p. 8.

[13]Research Division, National Education Association, *A Public School Salaries Series* Research Report 1962-R11, *Classroom Teacher Salary Schedules, 1962-63, Districts Having 6,000 or More Pupils*, Washington, D.C.: The Association, October, 1962, p. 10.

[14]*Ibid.*, pp. 110-12.

[15]*Urban Reporter Supplement, op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

[16]Fred F. Beach, "State Aid—New Hope for City Schools," *Urban Reporter Supplement, op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

[17]Edward C. Banfield and Martha Derthick, *A Report on the Politics of Boston, Massachusetts*. Cambridge, Mass.: Joint Center for Urban Studies of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University, 1960, pp. VI-99. (Multilithed)

[18]Floyd Hunter, *Community Power Structure*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953.

[19]Delbert C. Miller, "Decision-Making Cliques in Community Power Structures: A Comparative Study of an American and an English City," *American Journal of Sociology*, November, 1958, pp. 299-310.

[20]Research Division, National Education Association, *Class Size in Urban Elementary Schools, 1962*, Research Report 1962-R10. Washington, D.C.: The Association, October, 1962.

[21]"Urban Research Studies," *Urban Reporter Supplement*, op. cit., pp. 1-3.

[22]"Class Size in Elementary Schools," *NEA Research Bulletin*, October, 1960, p. 87.

[23]*Ibid.*, p. 88.

[24]James B. Conant, *Slums and Suburbs*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961, p. 66.

The Modern Urban Teacher

▼ "The modern urban teacher, isolated from his colleagues in other districts by the sheer totality of his involvement in a district larger than he can easily comprehend, the target of a Babel of communication, unheard, unrecognized, and worst of all, his inspired commitment dimmed by absurd, faceless, bureaucratic frustrations, could succumb to the alienated apathy which affects many depersonalized urban denizens. His other alternatives are to turn to the problems with a plea for solutions, with a program of collective neo-hysterical negativism, or a responsible, focused, astute attack.

"The urban teacher needs leaders who press for representative goals, understand the complexity of problems and their contexts, plan for specific priorities, act to build rather than just complain, and who can exercise mature judgment. Most of all he needs someone who can once again cause him to hope that his needs beyond subsistence and security can some day be understood and met. His needs are for stature, for fulfillment in his work, for the frontier adventure of new effort, and for meaning. Subhuman apathy is not for humans who can solve problems."

—Theodore Bass in the *CTA Journal*, "Problems of Urban Education" issue, October, 1966

'The Troubled Cities'

▼ "The Troubled Cities," a 60-minute documentary film, is available for purchase or rental from the NET Film Service, Indiana University, Audio-Visual Center, Bloomington, Ind. 47401.

Produced by National Educational Television, the film examines attempts being made to deal with problems of the urban poor, including slum housing, racial imbalance in the schools, and illiteracy and lack of job training.

The film rents for $9.15. Sale price is $200.

Child Care Centers

▼ New York City now maintains 40 child care centers serving 7,000 youngsters 10 hours a day, five days a week. A recent study recommended quadrupling the number of centers so that mothers on relief can take jobs and thus reduce relief costs. Parents pay fees from $2 to $25 a week, depending on income and family size.